



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**COMPLEX HISTORY:
PROVIDENCE DYEING, BLEACHING AND CALENDERING COMPANY
LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER**

A cluster of industrial buildings in the Olneyville section of Providence has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture and industry. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added the Providence Dyeing, Bleaching and Calendering (PDB&C) Company to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. Built incrementally between 1773 and 1918, the Providence Dyeing, Bleaching and Calendering complex is a important example of a textile dyeing and finishing plant, significant for its association with the rise and decline of textile manufacture and finishing as well as for its association with industrial development along the Woonasquatucket River.

The Providence Dyeing, Bleaching and Calendering Company occupies four acres, or most of the block bounded by the Woonasquatucket River, Valley Street, Delaine Street, and San Souci Drive in the Olneyville section of Providence. Built between 1773 and 1918, the eighteen industrial buildings range in height from one to four stories, have shallow gable or flat roofs, and are

constructed of rubble masonry, brick, and cinder block. The complex also includes an asphalt-covered cobblestone alley and the Paragon Dam, historically associated with PDB&C's power system until about 1900 and the company's process water until 1952.

The Patent Calender Company was founded in 1814 when Henry Hoppin, Hercules Whitney, Edward Mason Jr., and Daniel Bates bought the third steam engine to be used by the textile industry in Rhode Island and the first to be used for finishing cloth. The Columbian Steam Engine could reach up to 20 horsepower. The firm also bought patent rights to the first differential calendering machine, which imparts various finishes to cloth by squeezing it through rollers moving at different speeds. The combination of this calendering machine, steam power, geographic location (originally at the corner of Mathewson and Sabin streets in Providence), and entrepreneurial zeal soon made the Patent Calendering Company a regional leader in textile finishing.

Reestablished as the Providence Dyeing, Bleaching and Calendering Company, the firm purchased a small mill complex at a water privilege on the Woonasquatucket River in 1845. The location was named the Valley Bleachery and operated as a bleaching operation subsidiary to the main plant. Between 1845 and 1849, the company refitted an existing stone mill building—possibly the Brown George paper mill built in 1773—for use as a Bleach House. Around the time of the Civil War, the Valley Bleachery housed a 60-horsepower steam engine and was bleaching six tons of cloth per day.

In the 1880s, the company closed the Sabin Street location and hired mill engineer Frank P. Sheldon to modernize the Valley Street plant. New construction included a brick Starching, Drying and Finishing House; a Machine/Carpenter Shop; an expanded Boiler/Engine House; and a refitted facility for mercerizing fabric. The PBD&C was the first in the United States to use this process, in which fabric is immersed in a cold sodium hydroxide solution to make it more receptive to dyes.

The physical plant reached its present configuration by about 1918 with the construction of the Filter House, the Lime Room, the Calender Room, the Office/Storage Building, and a small

garage. Each improvement marked PBD&C's commitment to the latest services, such as colorfast vat dyeing, finishing of heavyweight fabrics, and dyeing and finishing of synthetic materials. The company survived the Great Depression and the war years by finding specialty markets and pursuing technical innovations. With the relocation of New England textile mills to the southern states, PDB&C was unable to secure an adequate market and ceased operations in 1952. The property was sold at auction, and much of the plant's \$300,000 worth of machinery was shipped to southern mills.

Since 1952, the complex has been used by various tenants. Current occupants include Antonelli Plating and Ocean State Metals. Several buildings in the complex are vacant. The present owner, Puente, plans to rehab the buildings for affordable live/work housing, office space for nonprofits and local businesses, and an incubator space for entrepreneurs in the food industry.

The National Register nomination for the Providence Dyeing, Bleaching and Calendering Company was prepared by preservation consultant Edward Connors. According to Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, "This property represents a critical aspect of Providence's historic leadership in the textile industry. Rehabilitation of its historic buildings will continue the Olneyville neighborhood's revitalization while preserving its heritage."

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning for Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed in the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is the state agency responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.

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